Politics and Religion: On the “Politization” of Greek Church Discourse

Yannis Stavrakakis

Abstract

The recent exclusion of the reference to religion from Greek identity cards has triggered an extraordinary reaction on behalf of the Orthodox Church. The Church hierarchy and Archbishop Christodoulos have led a campaign to oppose this decision, articulating a discourse that, by many accounts, was marked by a clear political profile. This reaction has polarized Greek society and has been dominating political life and media coverage for most of 2000 and 2001. These developments have also become the object of numerous analyses and academic discussions. Although a variety of dimensions are at stake, there is no doubt that the first crucial issue posed by the events is the question of the “politicization” of religious discourse. Is contemporary Greek Church discourse politicized? How can we account for this politicization within current global trends and the Greek historical context? These are some of the challenging questions explored in this paper.

In April 2000, after his second consecutive victory in the general elections, Greek prime minister Costas Simitis appointed his new government. In a move far from typical for Greek political life, he appointed as minister of justice a non-parliamentarian, a university professor of law, Michalis Stathopoulos. On 6 May 2000, the newly appointed minister aired, in an interview, a series of reforms aimed at modernizing the Greek legal apparatus in relation to issues of religious belief. He singled out the abolition of religious oath in courts, the introduction of the option for a secular funeral, and, most importantly, the deletion of the category of religion from identity cards, the document (issued by the police) that Greek citizens are supposed to carry with them at all times (Ethnos, 6 May 2000). For Stathopoulos as well as for other academics and commentators, the third reform was a necessary measure in order to ensure respect for human rights and, in particular, prevent discrimination against non Orthodox Greek citizens. Needless to say, this was a
view not shared by Archbishop Christodoulos—the head of the Holy Synod of the autocephalous Church of Greece and religious leader of the Greek Orthodox majority of the population. Setting the tone of what was to follow, he responded that on this issue “only one factor exists and this is the people, that cannot and should not be ignored” (Eleftherotypia, 9 May 2000).

At first no one thought that this “dogfight” would have any serious political consequences given that most attempts of the government to intervene into issues related to religion, during the 1980s and 1990s, ended in compromise for fear of alienating practicing Orthodox voters. Indeed the first responses both from the government spokesman and the minister of education and religious affairs were pointing in this direction. Everything changed, however, when the newly instituted—and up to that time generally unknown—independent Hellenic Data Protection Authority convened on the 15 May to discuss the issue. Its unanimous decision was that religious belief, among a set of other sensitive personal data, should be excluded from identity cards. A few days later, on 24 May, the prime minister confirmed during the question session in parliament that his government would stand by and implement the decision to exclude the category of religion from identity cards. There is little doubt that the prime minister’s firm position, which surprised many, reflected his personal views and, at the same time, could enhance the left-wing profile of his government that had been unable to escape the policy limitations set by market globalization on, more or less, all European center-to-left governments. On the other hand, many PASOK politicians and supporters remained skeptical and even wary of the so-called “political cost” that such a decision would entail in view of the influence of the Church on certain sectors of the population.

In any case, this decision has triggered an extraordinary reaction on behalf of the Greek Church, a reaction that has polarized Greek society and has been dominating political life and media coverage for most of 2000 and 2001. Archbishop Christodoulos led a campaign to oppose it, articulating a discourse that was marked by a clear political profile. Starting from the premise that an identity card is not a mere administrative document, but also “a proof of my personality” (Christodoulos 2000b:321), he characterized the exclusion as a coup d’etat, and started a struggle to overturn it. This struggle included mass rallies in Thessaloniki and Athens, rallies that were attended by hundreds of thousands of people, interventions in the media—which started following him day in and day out in order to transmit his latest attack on the government—and a campaign to gather as many signatures as possible calling for a referendum on the issue, even though such a procedure was not provisioned in the constitution. The polarization was
also reflected within the political and party systems: New Democracy, the largest opposition center-to-right party, supported almost unconditionally the Archbishop in what many journalists were quick to call his “holy war”—with many of its MPs attending the rallies and most of them, including its leader, Costas Karamanlis, signing the petition for a referendum.8

On 28 August 2001, it was announced that the Church had managed to gather 3,008,901 signatures asking for a referendum on the optional inclusion of the category of religion in Greek identity cards.9 Although it seems that signing the petition or opposing the government decision—a view shared by approximately 60% of the Athenians, according to some polls (Ta Nea, 2 July 2000)—did not entail alienation from the government, given that most polls over the last period showed no significant effects on its overall electoral appeal, there is no doubt that, by all standards, the number of signatures was impressive. At the same time, however, it revealed that the Church hierarchy was unable to mobilize the majority of its supposed following on such an (apparently) crucial issue. At around the same time (27 June 2001) the appeal of a group of theology professors and laymen against the exclusion of the category of religion from identity cards was rejected by the constitutional court (State Council—Conseil d’État), which decided that any mention of religion (either obligatory or optional) is unconstitutional. At any rate, a deep division was established in Greek public life and no obvious solution was visible since both the government and the Church were holding firm to their positions.

On 29 August, however, the Church received another, this time unexpected and much more politically significant blow, a blow that led to a suspension of most politicized activities on its behalf. After receiving the Archbishop and representatives from the Holy Synod who were supposed to inform him on the number of signatures collected by the Church, the President of the Republic, Constantine Stephanopoulos—a former conservative politician—issued a statement that included the following lines:

> The conditions for the calling of a referendum on the issue of identity cards have not been met, everybody is obliged to abide by the rules of the current Law and the signatures which were collected with a procedure that falls outside legally instituted procedures, cannot overturn the provisions of the Constitution (Kathimerini, 30 August 2001).

This was generally viewed as a clear prioritizing of the secular model of a “neutral” rule of Law over the identification of Hellenism and Orthodoxy over and above the Law that the Church was putting forward. It was even more damaging because it was coming from someone whose
institutional position, popularity—that was rated to be higher than the Archbishop’s—and conservative credentials left no obvious strategy for the Church hierarchy to continue its struggle at the same level of intensity without creating a national schism.10

Following the President’s statement, which retroactively marked a turning point in the entire issue, and the end of a whole cycle of mobilizations and discursive articulations on behalf of the Church and the Archbishop, it is time to reflect on the issue. My reflections will not be articulated in a vacuum,11 but will take into account the points already made by many commentators and analysts. Although I am suspicious of any pretensions to “neutrality,” I will try in what follows to avoid the polemical style that has characterized most academic and non-academic discussions so far. In this paper, I will limit myself to a discussion of the central issue of the politicization of Church discourse in Greece. In fact, I will examine the nature of this politicization against the background of global developments and by taking into account its theoretical and historical context. This exploration is designed to clear the ground from certain ideas and stereotypes that have dominated much of the debate but have failed to address crucial aspects of the phenomenon under examination.

**Politicization: Signs and Interpretations**

One of the conclusions shared by most commentators is that all these events marked a “politicization” of the discourse of the Church of Greece. Indeed, this politicization is so obvious in the Archbishop’s discourse that, by now, everyone in Greece is, more or less, used to it. Take for example his most well-known book comprising a series of articles published in the 1990s. The titles of some of the articles are indicative: “Nation and Orthodoxy: The Unbreakable Bond” (Christodoulos 1999:145), “The Volcano of Islamism—the Lava that ‘Burns’ the Balkans” (Christodoulos 1999:69), “Lost Chances for an ‘Orthodox Axis’ in the Balkans” (Christodoulos 1999:100), etc. Instead of discussing strictly religious, theological or even moral issues in any of the above, he debates what he calls the “great” national issues, especially those “related to the great horizons of our race [γένος], our identity and our survival” (Christodoulos 1999:13). He singles out the challenges posed by globalization, the membership of Greece in the European Union, Islamic fundamentalism, etc.

It is also clear that these texts are marked by a feeling of eschatological urgency; they are written as a warning and propose a set of measures to avoid “tragic consequences for Hellenism and Orthodoxy” (Christodoulos 1999:15)—two terms that are inextricably linked
for the Archbishop. His aim is to address the “final stage of a slippery course” which has led to our current identity crisis (Christodoulos 1999:81), especially now that the Greek people are “feeling surrounded by the vultures of misfortune with their deadly stench” (Christodoulos 1999:153). In the above articles, the Church is presented as the institution that can offer the leadership necessary to combat what threatens Greece and Hellenism with “extinction” (Christodoulos 1999:219). The Archbishop proposes that “If we all become clean and good Orthodox Christians, then we will bring change to our homeland” (Christodoulos 1999:83).

Moreover, although sometimes the Church denies vehemently that its discourse is politicized, the Archbishop himself has actually conceded this point. In the past, the Archbishop’s view was that if the Orthodox Church were to become politicized, that “would entail its spiritual alienation” (Christodoulos 1999:116). However, in a more recent rally in Athens, the Archbishop also stated explicitly: “They accuse us that we speak politically, that our discourse is political. We reply, yes our discourse is political, only in the ancient Greek sense of the term; it was never associated with party politics” (Christodoulos 2000a:66, my emphasis). He reiterates this view in a lengthy interview given to the newspaper To Vima on 11 February 2001, stating that “all of our actions are political” (Christodoulos 2001a:17).

The Archbishop’s “politicized” discourse is not in dispute. The Archbishop does not deny it or downplay it. In fact, some of his speeches reveal that not only are they political, but also that his discourse is primarily a political discourse. This “politicization” seems to be premised on a particular understanding of the role of the Church within Greek society. The state is deemed by and large incompetent in performing its duty vis-à-vis Hellenism. Therefore, the Church—which had previously helped the state to fulfill a guardian’s role—is now left alone to accomplish this task. As Tassos Pappas put it, “the discourse of Christodoulos aims at administering national culture and reproducing nationalist ideology—in other words, at substituting the uniting function of the state that is weakening, with the Church” (2001:53).

As we shall see, the Church of Greece has been invested from its creation as an independent institution with a political role. Antonis Manitakis has submitted several positions that are relevant here: “The aims of the nation-state determined the position and the function of the Church in Greek society.” As a public/state authority, the Church endorsed all national aims and was transformed into a “national” Church. “And now we live the following paradox: whereas the Polity is gradually de-nationalized, the Orthodox Church of Greece, fearful and defensive against the challenges, feeling that its ‘ethnocratic’ identity is
threatened” attempts to embody this role by itself and against the “pluralist” state, which is now attacked for its “weakened national sensitivity” (Manitakis 2000:17–18, 91). The above explanations seem to adequately reflect the position of the Church itself.\textsuperscript{13} It is clear for the Archbishop that, with the strengthening of the European Union and Greece’s full participation in it, “the state has ceased to be the obvious guarantor of national identity.” As a result: “The salvation of Hellenism can only be the task and accomplishment of the Church” (Christodoulous 1999:222–223).\textsuperscript{14}

The question is how social and political science will understand and explain this politicization. Those commentators who tend to adopt strong “enlightened,” “modernizing,” or “pro-Western” perspectives, often express their 

\textit{surprise} at the fact that the Church hierarchy and the Archbishop use “political” means (like mass rallies) to openly oppose a democratically elected government.\textsuperscript{15} For these commentators, religious faith is—\textit{or rather should be}—a matter of personal attachment that has no place in the public domain and should be confined to the private space, the individual life of citizens, or to an isolated/insulated niche of civil society.\textsuperscript{16}

Thus, many commentators have criticized the Archbishop mainly on the grounds that his political interventions are not justified within an order that assigns these political duties to other organs of the polity, on the grounds that his religious discourse does not legitimately occupy the public (political) space. For most of them, these problems stem from the lack of a constitutional separation between Church and state; such a separation, according to this view, would dispel any confusion once and for all. There are, however, at least two major problems with such a view; a theoretical/analytical one and a historical one. To begin with, this view relies heavily on a one-sided, ideological understanding of secularization which sees the complex socio-political realities of our late modern age through an outmoded and distorting normative lens. Furthermore, this view fails to take into account the historical background of the Greek case, that is, the Greek Church’s long tradition of politicization. Hence, many commentators were taken by surprise from the recent developments. It is clearly worth examining these two problems in some detail.

\textit{Secularization and Politicization}

The aforementioned position seems to take for granted an extreme version of the Enlightenment ideal of \textit{secularization}, involving a \textit{total differentiation} of the social space.\textsuperscript{17} As far as secularization is concerned, there is no doubt that, in its \textit{soft} version (as the relative marginalization
of religion in increasingly “desacralized” and “rationalized” societies) secularization is a reality; but only a partial reality. Although religious attitudes have indeed changed in modernity (with a decline in religiosity and a “privatization” of faith), this change is neither uniform nor, by definition, irreversible. In David Martin’s words, we “need not assume that secularization is a very long term or inevitable trend” (Martin 1978:12), especially in an age in which any sense of historical inevitability is disrupted and religion itself is making a comeback. As for the prediction that religion would disappear completely in enlightened societies—which is the strong version of the secularization thesis—this seems to be based on the attitudes of a limited “scientific elite” and does not reflect conclusive trends in the overall population (Martin 1969:4), nor does it reflect the global reality of contradictory forces (Keddle 1997:22).

It is also premised on a philosophy of history that views progress towards a rational and secular ideal society as ultimately inevitable, a view by now discredited. It was most recently attacked through discussions around modernity, late modernity, and post-modernity, as well as through the increasing awareness of contingency and historicity characteristic of poststructuralist theorization. Even sociologists like Peter Berger, who were initially of the rather opposite view, have come to acknowledge the importance of counter-secular developments and are increasingly putting into question the inevitability of secularization: “The world today . . . is massively religious, and it is anything but the secularized world that had been predicted (be it joyfully or despondently) by so many analysts of modernity” (Berger in Ahdar 2000:3). Genuine defenders of modernity have also pointed to the fact that one-sided models of modernization and secularization ignore the historicity of human social existence and the irreducibility of contingency within it (Lipowatz 1995:168).

On another level, one could even argue that a form of secularization—understood, this time, as a focus on worldly affairs—begins with Christianity itself insofar as Christianity introduces a “historicization of Eschatology,” a God that intervened in human history by sending his Son “into the world,” initiating thus a new historical time with a clear eschatological future (Blumenberg 1983:40, Ian 1999:5), and with whom we establish a personal relation, a notion very much stressed in Eastern Orthodox theology. In terms of their organization, almost from the beginning, Christian institutions also have been secularized, entailing bureaucratization and close relations with power and authority (Martin 1969:23). Besides, as specialized social institutions, Churches are themselves products of social differentiation (O’Dea 1966:81). In other words, although secularization has been crucial in the modern
experience, it can only be understood as a contingent and partial trend. Trends of this sort have to be understood as the result of social negotiation and political struggle, of a non-teleological historical development that is bound to produce side-effects and resistances, including the recent global comeback and “de-privatization” of religion. Moreover, secularization has not functioned merely as an external influence limiting the social function and appeal of religious institutions, but has been a constitutive element in Christian Churches and, as we shall see from our analysis of the Greek case, has sometimes led to a manipulation that indirectly enhanced their social and political salience.

The dislocation of the rationalist faith in the disappearance of religion and in the capacity of secular reason to resolve both practical and metaphysical questions (the so-called crisis of modernity), the collapse of the ideological imaginary of the Cold War, and the various dislocations produced in the course of globalization, have led during the last two decades to the return of religion, a return that takes a variety of different forms, from Islamic fundamentalism to “New Age” mysticism: “Contrary to once widespread expectations that religion would gradually disappear as a political force in modernizing societies, religious communities have been getting stronger in most nations over the last two decades or so” (Hasenclever & Rittberger 2000:641). The so-called Revenge of God is increasingly accompanying the Death of God proclaimed more than a century ago by Nietzsche. This comeback, however, does not always signal a denial of modernity (at least not in toto) and cannot be reduced to a mere side-effect of economic underdevelopment: “It is occurring in countries with different religious traditions and at different levels of their economic development, so it can not be explained as a feature of economic underdevelopment” (Thomas 2000:816). Most important, it is by no means limited to the Third World. It is present even in the center of the “secularized” West, in particular the USA.

As Marcia Ian has put it “if ‘secularization’ means a general falling away of religion into a world increasingly devoid of religion, then America has not secularized” (Ian 1999:4). Paradoxically, one of the conditions of possibility for this trend was the constitutional separation between Church and state, a founding principle of the United States of America. Setting aside any liberal interpretations of this principle, this separation in the U.S. constitution was initially conceived and eventually functioned to protect the religious domain from state intervention (Ian 1999:17). As a result, it benefited the Churches (Martin 1978:70), leading to a thriving of religious culture and to a permeability of the barrier between Church and state, this time originating from the religious side. Hence the “ politicization of some forms of American
Dedicated to correcting this divagation from the Way, to realigning America with the Christian agenda they interpret as inherent in the nation’s founding, groups such as the Christian Coalition have been busy amassing power at national, state, and local levels. (Ian 1999:30)

The following vignette is revealing of these developments: Two days after the events of 11 September 2001, “Jerry Falwell, founder of the Moral Majority, told Christian Coalition founder Pat Robertson (on the latter’s television show), that ‘God continues to lift the curtain and allow the enemies of America to give us probably what we deserve’. They agreed that the attack was God’s punishment for American toleration of pagans, abortionists, feminists and gays: ‘I point the finger in their face,’ said Falwell. ‘You helped this happen’” (Lind 2001:26). 23 Ironically, a Western religious fundamentalism is called to remedy a non-Western religious fundamentalism. However, it is not only religious leaders who put forward their own interpretations of political events and intervene in politics. What is most astonishing is that in a country founded on the so-called “Wall of separation” between Church and state (a phrase coined by Jefferson) politicians seem more than willing to respond in a way which legitimizes the collapse of separation and of secularization in general: “Today the Christian right is far more powerful in American politics than it was in 1800 or 1900 . . . in 2000, both the Republican and the Democratic presidential candidates claimed to be evangelical Protestants who had personally ‘found Jesus’” (Lind 2001:26).

Hence, secularization (in the sense of a gradual disappearance of religion) cannot be accepted as an unconditional and inevitable trend, although secularization (in the sense of the permeability of any barrier between state and church, and of the inherent secular dimensions of the sacred) cannot be disputed or, in practice, fully contained by any legal separation. Furthermore, although social differentiation is both a reality and a necessity for the reproduction of modern societies it does not entail the strict separation between specialized areas of the social, a point that was stressed by sociological theory. In that sense, “religion is interconnected with the other elements of society and culture in complex ways” (O’Dea 1966:99). There is always interaction between the religious and the cultural, the political, the economic and the societal, even when these are understood as distinct domains (Lipowatz 1995:168). As Rene Remond put it, “the idea of an absolute separation of religion from society may be a utopia that could not withstand the force of reality” (Remond 1999:8).

The same applies to relations between Law and religion: “Since
religion and law are significant aspects of mankind’s social existence a
complete compartmentalization of them is hardly practically feasible,
even were it desirable in theory (which is not)” (Ahdar 2000:3). In that
sense, the fact that the discussion in Greece has been largely hegemonized
by a legal problematic and mainly focused on the issue of the legal
separation between church and state, as if such a separation would be
able to contain the politicization of the Church of Greece and offer total
insulation to a secular political system, is rather misleading.24 Although
it constitutes a desirable development, such a separation (as we have
seen) is no panacea; moreover, such borders and frontiers, enshrined or
not in legal or constitutional frameworks, are always the cause of
tensions, disputes, conflicting interpretations and reinterpretations
(Zacharopoulos 1999:9), and have to be accepted as such. It could never
be otherwise as long as we are still far from the end of history: the
regulation of church-state relations will always be a matter of political
choice, beyond all (useful) legal systematizations and normativities
(Dimitropoulos 2001:24).25 In that sense, especially within a non-
totalitarian framework, separation can only be a form of relation (even if
it will be a relation of tension). It neither guarantees nor presupposes a
wholly secular society or the total exclusion of religion from political
discourse (Adams & Emmerich 1990:51).

One may disagree with the way the Archbishop or the Church
interpret and understand these frontiers, or with the way he is articulat-
ing his opposition to the redrawing put forward by the government—an
admittedly limited, reluctant and, at the same time, clumsy redrawing.
However, no solution will follow from idealizing and essentializing
“impossible” or, at any rate, unstable distinctions. Take, for example, the
argument of Manitakis and Anagnostopoulou, to name just two of the
supporters of such a view. They both seem to argue that it is possible to
distinguish, in an almost self-evident way, “spiritual” from “political”
issues (Manitakis 2000:139, 186; Anagnostopoulou 2000:343).26 One can
think of many issues that are both, but even if this distinction is accepted
as possible in principle we would need to decide, every time, whether a
particular issue is “spiritual” or “political,” unless someone claims to
have a universal criterion for distinguishing between the two in ad-
vance.27 And how else can this be possible without open discussion and
delicitation? Naturally, no side should be silenced in this debate, even if
some of us disagree with its views or style (provided that it does not
resort to the violent overthrow of the constitution of a democratic
polity).

In fact it is open discussion and deliberation that give us the right
to question traditionalist or fundamentalist values and standpoints. In
other words, conceptual distinctions, legal separations and differentia-
tions are necessary but can only be negotiated and legitimized through the political; otherwise, by sticking to some kind of legal essentialism, we run the danger of reoccupying an ultimately fundamentalist position.\textsuperscript{28} Hence \textit{strict} differentiations—such as the one proposed between the “spiritual” and the “political”—are revealed not only as impossible\textsuperscript{29} but also as undesirable. Why should one assign the spiritual exclusively to the jurisdiction of the Church or religion in general? Do we really want a de-spiritualized politics? Wouldn’t that enhance the trend for a “de-politicized,” “neutral,” technocratic politics which is pushing passion out of political life and threatens contemporary democracy? These questions acquire a special validity in the Greek context in which the word “spiritual” (πνευματικό) has a much broader meaning and socio-political relevance than in English and from which a distinction like the German one between “geistig” and “geistlich” is lacking.\textsuperscript{30}

Moreover, perhaps unwillingly, such an argument justifies the idea that there are social domains immune from political re-fashioning and democratic control.\textsuperscript{31} This is a profoundly conservative argument used to legitimize all sorts of established orders (most often, in our days, neoliberal globalization). In an age when “everything is political,”\textsuperscript{32} when politicization has been put forward as a \textit{conditio sine qua non} for the radicalization of democracy, sticking to essentialist frontiers is neither theoretically sound nor politically productive. In that sense, it is not politicization in general which is to blame; on the contrary, it is only politicization that will make possible, in due course, the democratization of Church institutions themselves. It is the \textit{particular} politicization many dislike.

Consider the French example: When, in the early 1970s, the Church intervened publicly “with declarations against sacred cows like nuclear weapons, the rightist government resented it, and individual Catholics with military associations readily embraced anti-clericalism, telling the Church to mind its own business; if it could not defend order as it had in the past, it should at least stick to ‘spiritual’ matters” (Ravitch 1990:154, my emphasis). Although often justified, the frustrated reaction of ultra-modernist sectors in Greece is not that different, provided one makes the necessary “translations.” The Church is almost denied the right to speak on socio-political issues ultimately because its discourse is so alien from an image of Greece (as a thoroughly modernized, secularized democracy) entertained by these analysts—so much so that it becomes traumatic even to acknowledge its presence within the public domain.\textsuperscript{33} Thus we experience a paradoxical situation in which instead of analyzing its discourse seriously, understanding and challenging it accordingly (something that becomes easier from the moment the Church itself articulates a political discourse, opening itself to public
criticism) some would prefer to silence the Church, exclude it from the public domain, avoiding any contact with what for them can only be a traumatic encounter with the dark side of Greek culture.34

Burden of History

The aforementioned attitude also fails, to a large extent, to register seriously the consequences of the role played by Orthodoxy and the Church of Greece during the last few centuries and especially since it became an autocephalous Church (1833), independent from the Patriarchate of Constantinople.35 In Byzantium the two distinct domains (Church and State, ἱερωσύνη and βασιλεία, sacerdotium and imperium) were conceived as being in “harmony” with each other but retaining some independence. In practice it was often the case that the one interfered in the other’s domain (most often the emperor, the Pontifex Maximus, who had a special role as convener of Ecumenical Councils, and was the only force of law in the Empire) occasionally creating tensions in the “partnership” (Runciman 1968:55–74).36

Things changed after the Fall of Constantinople. Under Islam, the Sultan chose to become “the protector of Orthodoxy” (Ware 1997:88), and “paradoxically enough, the things of Caesar now became more closely associated with the things of God than they had ever been before. For the Muslims drew no distinction between religion and politics . . . The Orthodox Church therefore became a civil as well as a religious institution: it was turned into the Rum Millet, the ‘Roman nation’. The ecclesiastical structure was taken over in toto as an instrument of secular administration” (Ware 1997:89).37 Thus religious and secular powers were united in the person of the Patriarch of Constantinople who was gradually recognized as the secular representative and leader of the Orthodox populations within the Ottoman system (Divani 2001:40, Kitromilides 1989). The Orthodox Church was invested with privileges, functions and powers of jurisdiction it had never enjoyed in Byzantine times (Runciman 1968:181).

The secular position enjoyed by the Orthodox Church did contribute considerably to the preservation of the collective identity of the Balkan peoples under Ottoman rule (Svoronos 1982:163), not least “by institutionalizing and safeguarding the distinction of the Christian subjects from their Muslim rulers” (Rudometov 1998:32). However, this distinction was primarily religious and not national. Nationalism, a modern movement, was absent from the Ottoman (and from the Byzantine) era and the various Balkan ethnies (Greeks, Serbs, Albanians, etc.), to use a term introduced by Anthony Smith,38 were marked by a
fluidity that made possible their unified status *vis-à-vis* the Sublime Porte as members of the religiously defined Rum-millet (Rudometov 1998:32).

Regarding the status of the Hellenic ethnic community, at best we can speak about cultural elements and an ethnic sense of belonging, that was initially (from the end of the Byzantine era when it resurfaced or rather was *reconstructed*) and throughout most of the Ottoman conquest subordinated to religious identification. When Georgios Scholarios was asked on the eve of the fall of the Byzantine Empire how he would define himself, although he often called his people Hellenes, he remarked: “I do not call myself a Hellene because I do not believe as the Hellenes believed. I might call myself Byzantine because I was born in Byzantium. But I prefer simply to call myself a Christian” (Scholarios in Runciman 1968:121). During that time, a series of cultural elements pertaining to a way of life (like Greek language, religion or a sense of belonging) were articulated in an emerging Hellenic *ethnie* and were preserved and protected by the Church in its new position as a religious/secular institution, subsequently to be used selectively for purposes of nation-building. In that sense, the Church “preserved the languages and the medieval imperial memories of the Balkan peoples, a heritage that in time was to be politicized by nationalism and made the basis of historiographical anachronisms” (Kitromilides 1989:178).

When the new Greek state was formed (1830), it tried, under the influence of Enlightenment ideals regarding statecraft, to limit this all-encompassing role (Frazee 1969:48) and also to modernize the Church by separating it from the pre-modern ecumenicity of the Patriarchate and its extended role within the Ottoman state; this modernization entailed the *nationalization* of the Church. The main architect of this refashioning was Georg Von Maurer, a German Protestant and member of King Otto’s regency: “If ever a church was legally stripped of authority and reduced to complete dependence on the state, Maurer’s constitution did it to the church of Greece” (Frazee 1969:114). True, it was impossible for the Church of the new Greek state to remain under the auspices of an institution subordinate to the Sultan; “it also needed reorganization, but instead of helping the church to make the necessary internal improvements, Maurer’s constitution simply made it an agency of an authoritarian state and a poor one at that” (Frazee 1969:124). The result was a gradual “instrumentalization” of the Church of Greece (Demertzis 1995:10, Georgiadou 1995:307, Georgiadou 1996:250, 271), the “total submission of the Church to the state” (Kitromilides 1989:182) to the point of becoming “a branch of civil service” (Mouzelis 1994:64), an *instrumentum regni* (Makrides 1991:291), a mere ideological weapon in the hands of the Greek state (Skopetea 1988:133; Dimitropoulos
The conversion of the Church of Greece to the secular values of Greek nationalism, its transformation into “a secular doctrine and certainly one at odds with its own deposit of faith” (Martin 1978:272), was so deep that “the Church of Greece spearheaded all nationalist initiatives in the latter part of the nineteenth and throughout the twentieth century” (Kitromilides 1989:166).

In the twentieth century the open politicization of the Church took a variety of new forms: The Church sided with the king against the reformer prime minister Venizelos who was excommunicated and anathematized by the Archbishop in 1916; it played an active role in the ideological aspect of the “struggle against communism” during the Civil War (1947–1949); and was largely obedient to the “religious ideology” (“a Greece of Christian Greeks”) introduced by the dictatorship (1967–1974) (Karayannis 1997, Venizelos 2000:22, Yannaras 1983:247, Metallinos 2000:40).

Conclusion

The recent “politicization” of religious discourse in Greece should not, therefore, come as a sudden surprise. In fact, politicization was there all along. The heritage of the official Church in Greece is a heritage of Political Orthodoxy (Agouridis 2000:360), to use a neologism highlighted by Beck in his analysis of Byzantine civilization (Beck 2000:119–146). Orthodoxy seems to have been always already “secular” and “political,” either under the Byzantine and the Ottoman system, or under the auspices of Greek nationalism and the direct control of the Greek state. Although the borders between the secular and the sacred are always unclear and socially constructed, in Greece one has to admit that the situation was more acute due to the burdens of history. Even attempts to differentiate between the state and the Church and limit the scope of religion (such as the autocephalia of the Church) eventually had the opposite results; they increased politicization by making the Church a state institution. If this was indeed envisaged as an act of secularization, of the desacralization of the public (political) space, it is an act that went too far. If, in other words, the aim was to have a church subjected to the state (Anagnostopoulou 2000:350), it has been so successful that now we have a Church that has become so secularized that it almost wants to replace the state. By nationalizing and politically investing (manipulating) the Church, the Greek state further encouraged and renewed trends already dominant, leading to the current crisis.

If the current politicization seems striking and surprising to many, it is because since 1974 the state has, to a large extent, ceased to play the
role of the direct controller and manipulator of the Church. Many thought that this would prompt the Church to follow a de-politicized course. Such a view, however, could only be based on a neglect of the relevant historical record (the long-term politicization of the Church is very difficult to change overnight) and of recent global trends that question the strong version of secularization (as the inevitable marginalization of religious institutions and beliefs) all of which point to the inherently politically constructed nature of social differentiation. What is indeed new is neither the politicization nor the secularization of the Greek Church; what is new is the emancipation of a traditionally politicized Church from the state.

This is not to say that the form this emancipation is taking is worthy of the name: in fact, unable to assume a new role beyond its customary “voluntary servitude” to the ideological priorities of the nation-state, unable to respond positively and creatively to this emancipation from above, fearful of the risks and challenges involved in the changing environment, the Greek Church in reality attempts to preserve the old regime (Kalantzidis 2001:59–60). Some sort of separation is bound to follow (1) insofar as the state continues its course towards pluralization and loses its interest in controlling and using the Church, and (2) insofar as the Church, as a result, assumes over time its new emancipated and more independent position. The Archbishop himself, then bishop of Dimitrias, had accepted this in 1990 (Eleftherotypia, 14 June 2000). Such a development, however, will not be the automatic or inevitable result of some universal principle or trend, but of a long process of negotiation and change with its ups and downs, tensions and contradictions.

If legal separation in France was pursued “with moderation and relative generosity” (Ravitch 1990:104), despite its long and strong anti-clerical tradition, one would expect any political initiative in Greece to combine, at least in a similar measure, resolve with respect. The success of such an initiative will also depend on the ability to cultivate alternative (modernizing) political and cultural ideals and mythomoteurs with deep popular appeal and hegemonic force. This remains to be seen.
NOTES

Acknowledgments. It has been argued that it is always impolite to argue religion or politics with strangers and dangerous to do so with friends. I am probably doing both in this paper and would never find the courage to embark in such a task without the support and valuable comments of colleagues who read earlier drafts of this text. In particular, I would like to thank Othon Anastasakis, Nicos Demertzis, Jason Glynos, Marcia Ian, Vassilis Lambropoulos, Thanos Lipowitz, Nicos Mouzelis, Francisco Panizza and Loukas Tsoukalis. Many thanks are also due to the editor of JMGS, Stratos Constantinidis, and to the two anonymous referees. This paper is the first part of a much broader research project focusing on the discourse analysis of contemporary Church discourse in Greece. See, in this respect, its companion pieces, “Religious Populism and Political Culture: The Greek Case,” South European Society and Politics, 7(3), 2003 and “Religion and Populism in Contemporary Greece,” forthcoming in a collective volume edited by Francisco Panizza, provisionally entitled Populism and the Mirror of Democracy, London: Verso, 2004.

1 It seems that, in Greece, religion was first introduced by law in official identity cards in 1945, although the measure had been already imposed by the Nazi forces during the occupation (1941–1944), perhaps as a way of distinguishing Jews from non Jews (Alivizatos 2001a:314–315, Ierotheos 2000:84–85). It has been recently shown that religion was also included in the equivalents of identity cards introduced in the Ottoman Empire in 1880 (http://iospress.gr/mikro2001/mikro20010113.htm).

2 Also see Stathopoulos, 1993, and Stathopoulos, 1999, for a more extensive and detailed account of his legal views and the range of his proposals.

3 Since 1993, Greece has been convicted eight times by the European Court of Human Rights (Strasbourg) on issues related to discrimination against Greeks belonging to religious minorities (Alivizatos 2001b:9). It is generally accepted that part of the legal framework regulating the practice of religion is outdated and biased in favor of the constitutionally “Established Church” (Eastern Orthodox Christianity). To give an example we can refer to the general law pertaining to the construction of churches and the designation of places of worship (Venizelos 2000:117). As Alivizatos has pointed out: “This law, enacted in 1938 by the Metaxas dictatorship, provides that, beyond the usual building permit, the construction of any church or place of worship requires previous authorization by the competent Greek Orthodox bishop irrespective of the religion that is to be practiced in the specific place” (Alivizatos 1999:31). Although in 1969 the State Council interpreted this law in a way making it possible for the administration not to abide by the “opinion” of the Orthodox bishop involved, the fact of his involvement remains (Dimitropoulos 2001:140). However, although the Church of Greece is enjoying a variety of privileges within the Greek legal order, the Greek state “grants fewer privileges of this sort than countries such as Ireland and, more recently, Poland and Croatia, which have given the Roman Catholic Church a more important role on societal issues like abortion and divorce” (Alivizatos 1999:28).

4 After the census of 1951 there are no official data on the number of Orthodox Christians in Greece. According to the 1951 census, 96.7% of the population considered themselves Orthodox (Georgiadou and Nikolakopoulos 2000:149). It seems that this sense of belonging and identification remains to this date as strong, with a Eurobarometer survey showing that in 1991, 98.2 % of the population considered themselves as belonging to the Orthodox religion (Demertzis 1995:12). Church-going, on the other hand, has shown some fluctuation, falling considerably since the 1960s, a trend that was consolidated after the 1967–74 dictatorship (partly because of the submission of the Church hierarchy to the junta) but showing an upward trend after the mid-nineties (Georgiadou and Nikolakopoulos 2000:151–152). However, although regular church-going and church-attendance has been
lower in Greece than in many European countries (Demertzis 1995:12), this does not seem
to indicate a loosening of the identificatory bonds with Orthodoxy since “in Orthodoxy
there is less emphasis than in Roman Catholicism upon the obligation to attend church
regularly” (Ware 1983:219), and any gaps in church attendance seem to be compensated
by other bonds between Orthodoxy and the Greek society. Indeed identification with
Orthodoxy does not seem to follow from the usual expressions of religiosity (church
attendance) nor usually from a valuation of the hierarchy of the official Church itself
(Georgiadou 1996:268). The identification is grafted, enshrined, and reproduced through
a variety of other institutions and cultural activities (from state celebrations to the personal
attachment to particular icons and local Saints and the association of particular religious
feasts with special practices, customs and foods—for example the paschal lamb—that a
family traditionally enjoys). It has also benefited from the protection of the state
(Georgiadou and Nikolakopoulos 2000:169). As far as the theological and ecclesiastical
parameters of Orthodoxy are concerned, see Yannaras 1991; Ware 1997. For more
information on the structure and institutional characteristics of the Church of Greece, see
Ware 1983.

5 These interventions included the introduction of civil marriage (which was eventu-
ally recognized in 1982 as equivalent to—the much more popular, to this date—religious
marriage, although initially conceived as a replacement or rather a prerequisite to
religious marriage), and the so-called issue of “Church property” which sparked a lot of
tension, culminating in the 1988 compromise (Karayannis 1997:195). The more general
issue of the full constitutional separation between church and state has been discussed
often since the restoration of democracy in 1975 but neither the government proposing
the constitution of 1975 (New Democracy) nor the PASOK governments that led the
processes of revising this constitution since then (in 1985 and 2000) found the courage to
push through such a measure that, by many accounts, would benefit not only the state but

6 This explains why the Church has claimed that it was taken by surprise when things
started to change. There is some truth in that in the following sense. The Church was not
informed or asked before the decision, nor was there any major public debate on the
issue—especially before the elections of 2000. It is very debatable if this was part of a
supposedly cunning plan on behalf of the government, an accusation subsequently made
by Church circles. Considered in the long term, however, one cannot overlook the fact
that there was a long history of discussions and public exchange on the issue at least since
1993, if not 1986, and two (aborted) attempts to introduce new legislation (Alivizatos
2001a:311). Ironically enough, the Archbishop himself recounts this long story in an
article written in 1997 and entitled “Religion in Identity Cards” (Christodoulos 1999:234–
241).

7 Appointed as head of the Orthodox Church of Greece only a few years before
(1998) and an emerging media star.

8 Of course, for parties to have links with Churches is not a rare phenomenon;
consider for example Christian democratic parties (Lamberts 1997) and especially the
Italian Christian Democrats whose primary aims included “safeguarding the role of the
Catholic Church in the country” (Leopardi and Wertman 1989:4). However, due to the
absence of a serious religious cleavage in the Greek political system, this was a move of
considerable importance for Greek politics.

9 According to the last census (2001) the population of Greece is 10,939,605 but the
electorate (which excludes foreigners and children) in the last general elections (2000)
was 8,976,135. As far as optional inclusion is concerned, by most accounts, it does not
preclude the possibility of discrimination, this time against those who have not declared
their religion.
A recent visit by the Archbishop to the minister of education and religious affairs, ending a twenty month long gap in communication, might signify that, without changing its position, the Church is now willing to seek a new *modus vivendi* with the government (*Kathimerini*, 20 December 2001).

There is already a considerable bibliography on this issue, most if not all of it in Greek. Apart from the numerous articles in newspapers and journals, some of which are to be found in the bibliography, it is worth consulting a series of books that have started appearing. See, in particular, Manitakis 2000, perhaps the most influential and detailed account so far, Venizelos 2000, Andrianopoulos 2000, Pappas 2001, Kontogiorgis 2001, Dimitropoulos 2001. The views of the Church and many of its supporters can be found in a 711 pages long, detailed and inclusive collection of documents, papers and speeches: *Holy Synod of the Church of Greece* 2000.

The agents of this extinction vary from Europeanization to modernization, from globalization and intellectualism to secularism, etc. The Archbishop has even attacked on similar grounds the new legal framework regarding conscientious objectors that gives them the right to do social service instead of military service, which is still obligatory in Greece (Christodoulos 1999:248).

Almost twenty years ago bishop Kallistos Ware had described one of the challenges facing the Greek Church as follows: “The future vocation of the Greek Church is to be not an ethnic body but a communion of faith and sacraments, a spiritual family to which men and women belong, not because of the accident of birth, but in consequence of personal conversion and self-dedication. Let the motto of the Church in the 1980s be, not *Ekklisia kai Ethnos*, ‘Church and Nation’. Still less *Ellas Ellinon Christianon*, ‘a Greece of Greek Christians’, but *mia zosa kai elefthera Ekklisia*, ‘a Church that is alive and free’” (Ware 1983:227). One can speculate that the course followed would probably disappoint Ware.

What is somewhat unusual is that one would expect this argument to function in a way encouraging the Church to accept if not to lead the way towards its separation from this “de-hellenized” state (Yannaras 1983b:198). The Church however is led to the opposite conclusion and blocks such a development.

Imagine, however, the surprise of the Church hierarchy when their opinion on the identity card issue was not only ignored but not even solicited before the particular decision. Given their previous identification of Orthodoxy with Hellenism and the Greek state, a link sanctioned for almost two centuries by the state itself, it must have been a traumatic dislocation.

In the United States there is a similar reaction by Liberal intellectuals who feel frightened from the rise of the religious right (Ian 1999:30). However, religion has also been important for American Democrats and Liberals like Jimmy Carter and Jesse Jackson.

By “differentiation” we understand a process “whereby each social sector becomes specialized... each social function forms a distinct specialized area,” one of the first signs being the disconnection of church and state (Martin 1978:69). In sociological theory, differentiation does not entail segmentation, the loss of contact between the different specialized areas; on the contrary, it is often seen as leading to greater interdependence and integration of parts (Abercrombie et al. 1988:70). This insight is often downplayed by commentators of church-state relations in Greece who sometimes assume an extreme version of *total* differentiation ignoring the interdependence involved in such social processes. In this text, our criticisms are addressed towards this latter unreflective version of “total differentiation.”

For a concise account of the process of secularization in Europe, see Remond 1999. See, in this respect, Stavrakakis 1999.

This return of religion has been deemed so important as to deserve a special issue of the international relations journal of the London School of Economics (*Millennium*), in
which it is proposed that a new branch of international relations should be introduced, namely *International Political Theology* which, ironically, rhymes with *International Political Economy* (Kubalkova 2000:675).

21 A general overview of the relation between politics and religion in the USA is given in Wald 1992.

22 On the constitutional heritage of the USA regarding religious liberty, and the tensions involved, see Adams and Emmerich 1990 and McConnell 2000.

23 Similar attitudes although marginal by and large, are not absent in Greece, especially among fundamentalist circles of Greek-Orthodox zealots. As Makrides has put it: “moralizing explanations of historical (e.g. the invasion of Cyprus by the Turks in 1974) or physical phenomena (e.g. earthquakes) among fundamentalists are a standing rule. According to bishop A. Kantiotis, for instance, the strong earthquake in Thessaloniki on 20 June 1978 was caused by the wrath of God due to the increasing number of abortions and blasphemies in Greece” (Makrides 1990:61). See also the explanations given by local priests and residents to contemporary “miracles” (like icons that cry, etc.), explanations which are often uncritically presented by some Greek media, although usually rejected by the official Church.

24 For an argument of this type, see Sotirelis 1999, where separation is presented as the “exclusive solution” that would restore the integrity and reliability of the democratic political system in Greece (Sotirelis 1999:64).

25 Even in France, another example of separation between Church and state (institutionalized in 1905), one of the legacies of the anti-clericalism of the French Revolution, the last two centuries have been marked by tensions, culminating in the impressive street demonstrations by supporters both of secularism and of Catholic education in 1994 (Knapp and Wright 2001:6, Bell and Criddle 1984:15–19). What is revealed thus, is that “when husband and wife separate, it does not mean that they no longer have any contact, if only to decide on the upbringing of the children born to them when they were married. That is why the breach brought into force in France in 1905 was unable to put a definitive end to all relations between religion and society” (Remond 1999:13). For a general overview of the relations between the Catholic Church and the state in France, see Ravitch 1990.

26 This is only one of the possible forms the aforementioned argument stressing the existence of an unbridgeable distinction between religion and politics can take. For a development of the same, more or less, argument along the private/public axis, see Manitakis 2001.

27 The issue is further complicated by the collapsing of the distinction between “ought” and “is,” from the circularity caused by the conflation of legal and constitutional deontological principles with the projection of the subjective desires of the analyst (Dimoulis 1999:92). In other words, analyses of these issues often fall prey of a certain wishful thinking. In Manitakis’s case, one can notice the imposition of a clear-cut Enlightenment “ought” on our ambiguous late modern “is.” He is not only putting forward the idea of a strict autonomy and independence between religion and politics as a regulative ideal, but presents it as an unambiguous reality. The problem with such a view—the ever-present distance between ideal and reality—is revealed when he argues that “religion and politics occupy in social reality distinct and differentiated places; political power is structured autonomously and independently from the economic and from any ecclesiastical power” (Manitakis 2001:11). It suffices to say that we are in full agreement with Manitakis on the latter part of his observation: financial and religious powers are related to the political system in a similar fashion. The exact nature of this relation, however, is hardly one of autonomy and independence; rather one of complicity and interdependence (both above and under the table). Unfortunately, social reality is not
reducible to our normative ideals and desires and has to be approached and accounted as such; any revealing social and political analysis has to start from the areas where an “anomalous” reality seems to escape our preconceptions regarding its functioning and structuration, no matter how “noble” these preconceptions may be.

28 As William Connolly has pointed out, “the historical modus vivendi of secularism, while seeking to chasten religious dogmatism, embodies unacknowledged elements of immodesty in itself” (Connolly 2000:4). In Keane’s words, the normative ideal of secularism can even become “a positive substitute for God” (Keane 2000:5). What is needed then is a “refashioning of secularism” (Connolly 2000:19) in a truly and not only nominally pluralist direction engaging more openly with dimensions of being downplayed or repressed in extreme forms of Enlightenment secularism. Even liberal political theory is increasingly becoming sensitive to such a need, on a variety of grounds. First of all for pragmatic reasons: “Some liberals have recently argued that no religious argument has any place in the public square. This premise further isolates religious conservatives, making them more hostile to liberalism and more illiberal” (Spinner-Halev 2000:19). According to this argument, wherever possible, engaging with religious people is typically better than shunning them (Spinner-Halev 2000:155). Secondly, “religious liberty means being able to act on one’s beliefs. It would be peculiar to say that this is true in private but not in public; such an argument presupposes a neat division between public and private that does not exist. People are properly guided by their religious beliefs in all kinds of ethical decisions, some of which inevitably spill over into politics” (Spinner-Halev 2000:146). There is no reason why a “fundamentalist” secularist grounding of a political standpoint is more legitimate from a religious one. Third, it is often the case that “religious views actually have little to do with religion” (Spinner-Halev 2000:146). In that sense, the views themselves are more important than their rhetorical reliance on a religious, secular or other principle.

29 Even Manitakis himself has recently acknowledged the relative nature of such distinctions (Manitakis in Kitromilides et al. 2001:34).

30 For example, in Greek the expression “spiritual person” (πνευματικός ἀνθρώπος) has the same conceptual content with the word “intellectual” in English.

31 Here the political is not understood as a sub-system of the social topography but as the ontological moment of all social reality. See, on this distinction between politics and the political, Laclau 1990, Stavrakakis 1999, ch. 3.

32 However, this maxim has been often applied in a relativist and rather naive way.

33 At the same time the Church and the Archbishop are accused for not speaking against the military regime of 1967–1974. Christodoulos has served as the Chief-secretary of the Archbishop appointed by the junta and, by his own admission, knew nothing about the ugly face of the repressive regime (tortures, etc.). However, the paradox here is that it is often the same people that, on the one hand, deny the Church the right to intervene in the public domain and, on the other, accuse the Archbishop for not speaking openly against the junta (Zoumboulakis in Kitromilides et al. 2001:32).

34 The urge to repress this “ugly” trace of ethno-religious discourse ultimately signals a difficulty in registering the ambivalent character of contemporary Greek identity and an inability to effectively negotiate a new hegemonic modernizing future. Such a future cannot ensue as the automatic result of an essentialized form of modernization. It would require a paradigmatic shift in what has served as “the ‘myth-symbol’ complex, and particularly the ‘mythomoteur’ or constitutive myth of the ethnic polity” (Smith 1986:15, Armstrong 1982). The equation of Hellenism with Orthodoxy, the hegemony of an “ethno-religious ideology” has served as one of the “founding myths,” one of the most used dichës of the neo-hellenic state: “it is taught in schools, enunciated from the pulpit, supported with fanaticism by politicians of all shades” (Pappas 2001:19). The fact that all these claims are being increasingly pushed to the margins of political life, does not entail
their disappearance since they persevere in the form of largely unconscious fantasies, the same way that “Orthodoxy means more to them [the Greeks] than their secular lifestyles would allow us to believe” (Makrides 1991:286). Even if agreement is reached on the content of such a modernization, its success would depend on its ability to create a new hegemony involving a shift in the fantasmatic background that would be reflected in popular belief and social practice. If possible, a true modernization of social and political life would thus presuppose a “modernization of fantasy.” Of course, it would also require addressing the dislocations and injustices involved in modernization and capitalist globalization and the grievances that find refuge in the security of old fantasies (Psychopoulos 2000). Regardless of all the rhetoric, one often detects not only inability but also an unconscious unwillingness to deal with the construction, negotiation and popular legitimation of a new fantasy, a new social, political and national mythomoteur. Hypotheses explaining this unwillingness or difficulty include the fear that these old fantasies are still so strong—albeit in a more implicit way—that living in denial and fantasizing their silencing or automatic elimination is easier than fighting them face to face, and/or the fact that although often expressed in an extreme form that may find appalling—as in the case of the religious/political discourse we are examining—these old fantasies are still “our own fantasies,” reveal something about our repressed self that is extremely traumatic to admit and even more difficult to change. On this issue also see Giannoulopoulos 1998.

See, on this issue, Frazee 1969, and Stavr注 1994, for a first historical account of the relevant events.

For more information on the relevant Byzantine arrangements and the socio-political significance of the church, also see Mango 1994.

More recent historical research has shown that, although the Ottomans used the Patriarchate from early on perhaps as a means to control but, most important, to tax the Christian populations of the Ottoman Empire, the Millet system was not fully institutionalized until the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries (Kostis 1991:60).

Before the emergence of nationalism (an Enlightenment ideology), “we can speak of a Greek cultural or ethnic community [of an ethnie, or at times of weakened self-consciousness of an ethnic category (Smith 1999:12, 105)] but not of an ancient Greek ‘nation’” (Smith 1991:8). Accordingly, “any attempt to impose contemporary national categories on the Byzantine world can only lead to a misinterpretation of the facts” (Mango 1994:6). Here an ethnic community is understood as “a [named] type of cultural collectivity, one that emphasizes the role of myths of descent and historical memories, and that is recognized by one or more cultural differences like religion, customs, language or institutions,” “the product of specific historical forces [not a primordial entity] and . . . subject to historical change and dissolution” (Smith 1991:20, Smith 1986:32). The imagined element, stressed by Anderson (Anderson 1991), is also predominant here since what is important is not any facts of common descent as a shared myth of common descent (Smith 1991:22). From this point of view, it is irrelevant whether contemporary Greeks really descent from Ancient or Byzantine Greeks; what is important is that at certain points such a sense of affinity or descent was constructed or re-constructed: “Such a ‘Greek revival’ was to surface again in the tenth and fourteenth centuries, as well as subsequently” (Smith 1991:29). This idea of descent, of a linear historical connection between Ancient and modern Greece, so crucial for Greek nation building, was eventually “scientifically” demonstrated by the sciences of historiography, mainly in Paparrigopoulos, and folklore studies (Skopetsa 1988, Politis 1993, Herzfeld 1986).

However, for the last one thousand years being called a Greek, more precisely a “Hellene,” was in disrepute and usually meant being a pagan. Things changed when, as we have already mentioned, “suddenly, in the fourteenth century Byzantine intellectuals began to speak about themselves as Hellenes” and to refer to a “community of Hellas”
(Runciman 1968:119). Others locate this first revival of Hellenism in the eleventh century (Svoronos 1982:87, 145–161; Yannaras 1992). An exclusionary, nationalist, self-definition was fully developed under the influence of the Enlightenment and was gradually disseminated to the whole population of Greece after the establishment of the Greek state and throughout the nineteenth century. See Skopetea 1988.

40 During this whole period, the Church was often torn between its ties with Hellenism and its more ecumenical role, a tension that became open as soon as secular nationalism utilized these elements to produce an exclusionary identity that was clearly at odds with the ecumenical ideal and traditional Byzantine consciousness (Diamandouros 1983:56–57), as well as with the Patriarchate’s role and interests as leader of all Orthodox populations in the Ottoman Empire. It seems that this was one of the reasons for its ambivalence towards the Greek revolution (1821) with the higher hierarchy opposing and condemning it and the lower clergy supporting it—and fighting in the struggle against the Ottomans (Divani 2001:44), which may also explain the lack of a serious anticlerical movement in Greece after the revolution (Skopetea 1988:121). This tension seems to be affecting the discourse of the Greek Church to this date. On the one hand, Archbishop Christodoulos has often spoken against racism and discrimination (Christodoulos 1999:37, Christodoulos 2001b), transmitting an ecumenical message according to which the Church stands higher than the nation because it is ecumenical, and includes all the people on earth, “all the children of God” (Christodoulos Εκκλησία και Εθνός:10). On the other hand, however, he has pointed out that “Orthodoxy, beyond its ecumenical character, has been established as a permanent element of our national identity, while the Byzantine roots of our national consciousness form the essential framework of our particularity” (Christodoulos 1999:146). Thus, being Greek equals and can only mean being Christian Orthodox (Christodoulos 1999:146). “The Race [Έθνος] owes its identity to the Church” (Christodoulos 1999:151) since “for centuries Orthodoxy and Race have been indistinguishable, and Orthodoxy is the most durable organic element of Greek continuity” (Christodoulos 1999:173). “Our nation [Εθνός] has been privileged and has received the blessing of God” (Christodoulos 2000a:51). A further trace of the tension is the use of both γένος and Εθνός in religious discourse which refer to distinct forms of collective community—γένος to the pre-modern ethnic-religious community and Εθνός to the community of the nation-state. On these issues also see Christodoulos 1999:220–1. For a detailed historical account of the two legacies and their origins, see Sherrard 1973. In translating γένος with “race,” admittedly not an entirely satisfactory translation, I am taking my lead from Zakythinos 1976:188, where a detailed account of the two legacies is also to be found: Zakythinos 1976:144–179.

41 Most accounts focus very much on the role of Maurer, but it seems that the demand for an independent Church was widespread even before the arrival of king Otto, although a more tactful procedure vis-à-vis the Patriarchate might have been followed without the intervention of Maurer (Conidaris 1996:220). Also see, in this respect, Paparizos, 1991: 67, and Troianos and Dimakopoulou 1999:13, 121, where important documents of the period are reproduced.

42 In return, the Church hierarchy benefited from privileges and the state flattery, and priests became “civil servants” to this day being paid by the state. Furthermore, some Church circles saw in state support the guarantee for the spiritual hegemony of Orthodoxy in Greece (Lipowatz 1995:174). Regarding the alienating results of these arrangements for the Church itself, see Yannaras 1983a:74–79, Ramfos 2000, Yannaras 2000, Yannaras 2001:168. Although Christodoulos has managed to bring the Church back to the center of media attention and public debate, an extraordinary accomplishment in itself, it is debatable to what extent he is capable of changing a state of decay marking the Church since then, a state Yannaras has described as follows: “The so-called ‘official’ church looks
On the “Politicization” of Greek Church Discourse 175

as if it is in a state of comatose aphasia, with the Episcopal position the object of power manipulations . . . the great majority of priests hostages to the professionalization of their calling and the ecclesiastical schools in a tragic state of collapse” (Yannaras 1992:488).

43 It has been argued that, in fact, the Church has been acting as an Ideological State Apparatus, in the Althusserian sense of the term (Chiotakis 2000:312). Also see Althusser 1990:67–121.

44 In a 1997 paper, Stathopoulos himself has proposed “a system of friendly, very friendly separation” between church and state in Greece (Stathopoulos 2000:59). A variety of legal steps in this direction is outlined in Konidaris 2000.

REFERENCES CITED

Abercrombie, Nicholas, Stephen Hill, and Bryan Turner

Adams, Arlin and Emmerich, Charles

Agouridis, Savvas
2000 Σάββας Αγουρίδης, «Η εκκλησία ως φορέας άσκησης εξουσιαστικής δράσης». In Ιδρυμα Καράγιωργα. Δομές και σχέσεις εξουσίας στη σημερινή Ελλάδα. Athens.

Ahdar, Rex

Alivizatos, Nikos
2001b «Θα χρειαζόταν θράσος περισσό . . .». Τα Νέα, 30 August.

Althusser, Louis

Anagnostopoulou, Sia
2000 Σία Αναγνωστοπούλου, «Η ιστορικότητα του “εθνικού ρόλου”: έθνος ελληνικό ή έθνος ελληνορθόδοξο». In Ιδρυμα Καράγιωργα, Δομές και σχέσεις εξουσίας στη σημερινή Ελλάδα. Athens.

Anderson, Benedict

Andrianopoulos, Andreas

Armstrong, John

Beck, Hans–Georg
Bell, David and Byron Criddle

Blumenberg, Hans

Chiotakis, Stelios
2000 Στέλιος Χιωτάκης. «Οφείς τής ’νεο-ορθόδοξης’ αναπαραγωγής της ’κοινότητας’ (GEMEINSCHAFT)». In Τάφριμα Καράγωρα, Δομές και σχέσεις εξουσίας στη σημερινή Ελλάδα. Athens.

Christodoulos, Archbishop
2000b «Ομιλία του Μακαριώτατου Αρχιεπισκόπου Αθηνών και Πάσης Ελλάδος Χριστοδούλου στην Λαοσύναξη των Αθηνών». In Holy Synod 2000.
2001a Interview given to Th. Lalas, Vinagasiou, To Bήμα, 11 February.

Connolly, William

Crouch, Colin

Demertzis, Nicos

Diamandouros, Nikiforos

Dimitrakos, Dimitris
2000 Δημήτρης Δημητριάκος. «Πώς θα κοπέι ο ομφάλος λόφος συνάμεσα στο χράτος και την εκκλησία». To Βήμα, 4 June 2000.

Dimitropoulos, Panagiotis

Divani, Lena
On the “Politicization” of Greek Church Discourse
Kitromilides, Paschalis

Kitromilides, Paschalis, Nikos Kokosalakis, Antonis Manitakis, P. Nikolopoulos, Christos Yannaras, and Stavros Zouboulakis

Knapp, Andrew and Vincent Wright

Konidaris, Ioannis

Kontogiorgis, Georgios

Kostis, Costas

Kubalkova, Vendulka

Lamberts, Emil (ed.)

Leonardi, Robert and Douglas Wertman

Lind, Michael

Lipowatz, Thanos

Makrides, Vassilios

Manitakis, Antonis
2001 «Ο ′Λαός του Θεού’ ενάντια στον ′Λαό της Πολιτείας ′», O Πολέτης, 94:7–13.

Mango, Cyril
Mappa, Sofia

Martin, David

McConnell, Moira

Metallinos, Georgios

Monsma, Stephen and Soper, J. Christopher

Mouzelis, Nicos

O’Dea, Thomas

Paparizos, Antonis

Pappas, Tassos

Petrou, Ioannis

Pinakoulas, Antonios

Politis, Alexis
1993 Αλέξης Πολίτης, Ρωμαντικό χρόνια. Athens: Μνήμων.

Psychopedis, Kosmas

Ramflos, Stelios
2000 Στέλιος Ράμφος, «Η αβάσταχτη ανασφάλεια της εκκλησίας», Καθημερινή, 4 June.

Ravitch, Norman
Remond, Rene

Runciman, Steven

Rudometov, Victor

Sherrard, Philip

Skopetea, Elli

Smith, Anthony

Sotirelis, Yiorgos

Spinner-Halev, Jeff

Stathopoulos, Michalis

Stavrakakis, Yannis

Stavrou, Theofanis

Svoronos, Nikos

Swatos, William (ed.)
On the “Politicization” of Greek Church Discourse

Thomas, Scott

Troianos, Spyros and Harikleia Dimakopoulou
1999 Σπύρος Τριανός και Χαρικλεία Δημακοπούλου, Εκκλησία και πολιτεία. Athens: Σάκκουλας.

Tsatsos, Dimitris
2000 Δημήτρης Τσάτσος, «Από το ναό στην αγορά», *Τα Νέα*, 26 June.

Venizelos, Evangelos

Wald, Kenneth

Ware, Kallistos

Yannaras, Christos
2000 «Ελεύθερη πτώση στο κενό», Καθημερινή, 4 June.

Zacharopoulos, Nikos

Zakythinos, Dionysios